

**'It stays with you': Multiple evocative representations of dance and future possibilities for studies in sport and physical cultures**

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## **‘It stays with you’: Multiple evocative representations of dance and future possibilities for studies in sport and physical cultures**

This article considers the integration of arts-based representations via poetic narratives together with artistic representation on dancing embodiment so as to continue an engagement with debates regarding multiple forms/representations. Like poetry, visual images are unique and can evoke particular kinds of emotional and visceral responses, meaning that alternative representational forms can resonate in different and powerful ways. In the article, we draw on grandparent-grandchild interactions, narrative poetry, and artistic representations of dance in order to illustrate how arts-based methods might synergise to offer new ways of ‘knowing’ and ‘seeing’. The expansion of the visual arts into interdisciplinary methodological innovations is a relatively new, and sometimes contentious approach, in studies of sport and exercise. We raise concerns regarding the future for more arts-based research in the light of an ever-changing landscape of a neoliberal university culture that demands high productivity in reductionist terms of what counts as ‘output’, often within very restricted time-frames. Heeding feminist calls for ‘slow academics’ that attempt to ‘change’ time collectively, and challenge the demands of a fast-paced audit culture, we consider why it is worth enabling creative and arts-based methods to continue to develop and flourish in studies of sport, exercise and health, despite the mounting pressures to ‘perform’.

Keywords: Dance, narrative poetry, narrative art, arts-based representations, neoliberalism



**Illustration 1:** Owton, H. (2012) "It stays with you", Charcoal, 297x420 mm, 130gsm white cartridge paper

**Illustration 1:** "It stays with you" Owton, 2012, Charcoal, 297x420 mm, 130gsm white cartridge paper

### **It stays with you**

Extreme body consciousness,

One does,

Not really thought about it,

When you're dancing,

You do express yourself through dancing,

I think they do; I think it's all part of them,

All how you move as well; graceful,

Especially if you've done ballet,  
True; often tell people who do dance,  
Posture; holding their heads high,  
It does stay with you.

It always stays with you,  
The theatre world always stays with you,  
all through your life,  
It's always with you,  
I was always in touch with my colleagues,  
I took our daughter back to the theatre,  
They all loved to see her,  
I mean I've always kept in touch with them,  
All right up until some of them have died...

You become a family when you're in the theatre world,  
Especially when you're with dancers,  
In a theatre world, you're rehearsing all the time,  
You just become a family  
really.

The above artistic impression and co-constructed poem emerged from a grandparent-grandchild relationship that we have discussed in previous research projects (Owton 2011, 2015). Here, 'Granny's poem' highlights the ways in which embodied knowledge was shared with other dancers: 'you become a family', via intersubjective and

intercorporeal understandings (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2016). By incorporating a multitude of different forms/representations, drawing and poetry can generate new knowledge about our embodied existence and act as powerful indicators regarding multiple meanings embedded within our culture (Phoenix 2010). In this case, through the messages of dance, the body is perceived to have ‘good posture’, it is deemed graceful, and there is a heightened level of physical and mental self-discipline. As Granny notes, these things ‘stay with you’; they become sedimented as memory in the body (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2016, Schwaiger 2008). As Margalit (2002, p. 14) argues: ‘memory is knowledge *from* the past. It is not necessarily knowledge *about* the past’ and it is thought to advance and validate identities, fuel grievances and give meaning and narrative coherence to individuals and collectivities. In this sense, the body is the vehicle of being-in-the-world and enhances our understanding of how we carry all our bodily experiences with us (Leder 1990). It provides a grounding for the sharing of intersubjective and intercorporeal understandings and experience (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2016), as in Granny’s collective sharing with others in the dance family.

We are not merely embodied as individuals, however, for being embodied also means being embedded in society/societies, culture(s), and subculture(s). Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) emphasis on intercorporeality as a fundamental aspect of our being-in-the-world is key to our understanding here. We particularly note that acting together in a coordinated fashion, such as in dance, can be enhanced by a form of pre-reflective or ‘intuitive’ corporeal engagement with the world and with others (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2016) and by shared experiential and corporeal ways of knowing (see also, Schwaiger 2008). Dancers come to understand, via shared corporeal knowledge and experience, what other dancers are experiencing and feeling, and may make bodily

adjustments on the basis of that understanding, to make allowances for other bodies at particular times and in particular places. Furthermore, we need to recognize the interrelatedness of not just mind and body, but also mind, body and place, as Pink (2009, 2012) notes.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's (1968, 2001) work, we highlight how dance, a specific physical-cultural lifeworld, requires the ongoing development, training and performing of a particular 'habit body' (Crossley 2001). This habit body, Crossley (2001) argues, highlights the role of the body as the medium through which people experience their socio-cultural worlds, and also how bodily experience reflects the culture in which it occurs; in this case, the domain of dance. The dance habit body is thus situated in cultural and sub-cultural environments that influence the way in which dance 'stays with' people, sometimes over a lifetime. A characteristic of the dancing habit body is that it is a highly disciplined mind-body, as highlighted in the following poem. Here, Granny portrays how the disciplined nature of dance stays with her and is carried into other aspects of her life and work.

### **A grade of discipline**

Macmillan I was working,

Theatre referring,

Strict; very!

I didn't have to be nasty...

at all.

One girl; one morning...

In her office; her breakfast on the table...

*I soon shifted that I can tell you!*

I used to say, because I was in the theatre,  
you didn't just *arrive* at 10 o'clock,  
you arrived and got dressed ready  
for rehearsals to be on *stage* at 10 o'clock.

Try and tell them,

"*you don't arrive at 9*

which they did,

"*you come at a quarter to 9,*

*you get ready and start at your desk at 9 o'clock!"*

I said, "*you're all ready to go home at quarter to 5,*

*you're standing with your clothes on, waiting for 5 o'clock*

*out the door..."*

They used to laugh... ah haaaaaa,

I mean, you'd see them all with their coats on at quarter to 5...

Theatre; in the evenings, if you were late,

the curtain would've gone up - you'd have missed it,

2 minutes late - you'd have missed it,

you've gotta come in, get made up, whatever...

A grade of discipline... discipline...

you don't have to be nasty,

you just make sure people are disciplined.

Also drawing on phenomenologically-inspired perspectives, Frank (1995) refers to a matrix of embodiment types, and within this the concept of the *disciplined* body-self is primarily concerned with *predictability* through actions of self-regimentation. Wainwright and Turner (2006 p. 242) emphasize the necessity of body discipline and training regimes in developing a dancer's 'athletic physical capital':

What we describe as 'athletic physical capital' can be divided into four main aspects: speed, strength, stamina and suppleness. [...] Without such discipline, a ballet dancer cannot achieve the 'attack' (the sharp, clean and incisive performance of a movement) that is necessary for style and effect.

Such corporeal discipline can then become ingrained, routinized, part of the dancer's or athlete's everyday life (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2001). As Wainwright and Turner (2006 p. 243) argue, 'the discipline that is required to be a professional dancer becomes so ingrained (so embodied) that the sheer physicality of dancing becomes addictive'. Whilst Granny's narrative does not speak of the addictive elements of bodily discipline, for her, this discipline has become so engrained, so 'written into' the body that even many years after leaving the world of professional dance, she continues to follow and honour the disciplinary code to which her body was subjected as a dancer. Thus, the dance mind-body is its past; it carries along and *incorporates* the past, so that Granny's body 'bears not only its injuries and scars, but also all bodily memories and skills' (Klemola 1991, p. 5). Indeed, the 'ghosts' of injuries and scars may threaten to emerge in more material form as an old injury recurs (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2015).



Drawing on Goffman's (1959) analysis of the performative nature of the body, we can see how Granny's poems also demonstrate a form of dramaturgical or performative discipline: literally, the curtain goes up and the dancers/social actors have to be on stage and primed to perform in the 'front regions' of life (Owton 2015a). We return to issues of performativity and pressures to perform, in the following section.

### **Future possibilities and a call for slow scholarship**

The expansion of the visual arts into interdisciplinary methodological innovations is still a relatively new approach (Leavy 2009). Increasingly though, researchers are using visual images, including in the field of sport and exercise (e.g., Owton 2013a, 2013b, Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2015, Gravestock 2012; Phoenix 2010; Phoenix and Smith 2011), as a part of data analysis as well as a medium to represent data. This can be with the intent of confronting and challenging stereotypes and prevailing ideologies (Leavy 2009). Phoenix and Smith (2011), for example, suggest that the strengths of visual research include its creativity, expressivity and uncertainty. Offering poetic narratives together with an artistic representation is aimed at envisaging how these arts-based methods might interact with each other to offer new ways of 'knowing' and 'seeing' (Leavy 2009, Owton 2013) together with the idea that these alternative forms might resonate and stay with us, representing links between the physiological, the psychological and the social (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2009, Sparkes 2009).

Novel ways of representing our research findings are likely to require new ways of judging outputs and offerings. Opening up possibilities for the future of arts-based methods and creative analytic practices thus requires new and imaginative judgement criteria to accommodate these types of research (Barone and Eisner 2012), and to celebrate rather than stifle their potential. Furthermore, along with other novel

approaches, such as camera-based ‘moving methods’ (Palmer 2016), video diaries (Bates 2013, Cherrington and Watson 2010), arts-based methods provide a range of opportunities to gain access to sensorial experiential aspects (Owton 2015a, Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2006, Sparkes and Smith 2014) and modes of performance, such as movement and music (Owton 2015b, Carless 2011, Carless and Douglas 2014, Douglas 2012, Douglas and Carless 2008, Douglas and Carless 2013). There is much scope for considering how layered arts-based methods might be intertextually connected and form new meanings.

All these future possibilities could, however, be under threat. Not only does good scholarship require time: time to think, write, read, research, analyse, edit and collaborate (Mountz *et al.* 2015), but arts-based methods require thinking and studio space (Leahy 2015). Indeed, arts-based methods challenge us as researchers to:

‘...not so quickly select a comfortable way to create and share research, but rather let the inquiry’s focus, the data’s form, the audience’s perspectives, and our inner muse guide us to consider new alternatives’ (Chenail 2015).

Contemporaneously with the turn towards more innovative research methodologies, within the British higher education system a neoliberal university culture has been increasingly demanding of academics to engage in ‘fast’ work: higher productivity rates in ever more tightly squeezed time-frames. The neoliberal transformation of the university and the spread of the audit culture have been well documented (see for example, Shore and Wright 1999, Apple 2005), and research is uncovering the isolating and deeply embodied effects of this culture (Sparkes 2007). Academics have sought to find solutions, such as Pelias’ (2004) methodology of the heart, which poetically evokes

some of the more spiritual elements of life in academia, and others similarly seek to salvage something positive from higher education's currently overworked system (e.g., Hussey and Smith 2010, Lawthom 2015). Given the space and time it takes to engage in creative academic research and practices, and to produce well-crafted scholarship, the intense productivity pressures from the neoliberal higher education system are in grave danger of crushing creativity instead of nurturing it.

As Mountz and colleagues (2015 p. 3) argue, 'slow work' that is required to produce good scholarship 'both defies and is threatened by the myriad demands of our time as academic laborers'. For arts-based methods, the time-starved neoliberal culture and increased demands on our time means that we are expected to do more and more with our work time (and indeed beyond it), for example, teaching more and larger classes, competing for dwindling research grants and funds, developing administrative skills and doing administrative tasks that in previous times would have been undertaken by administrative specialists (Allen-Collinson 2009b), and also keeping on top of social media notifications (Mountz *et al.*, 2015). This highlights the need to challenge neoliberal notions of time as measured in terms of the length and intensity of the working day (Meyerhoff *et al.* 2011). As Meyerhoff and colleagues argue, higher education must involve more than making 'more time' for our work, it must also seek to 'change' time, so that academics challenge and critique the practices by which universities harness the creative time of labour, and develop a revolutionary theory of time that enables us to see capital not as the generative source of innovation, but rather as parasitic upon it. A further affirmative move, these writers suggest, is to explore experiments both *intra* and beyond the university with self-valorising practices of collective learning.

Others, too, have called for feminist interventions (e.g., Lawthom 2015), including strategies for ‘slow’ scholarship that ‘favours deep reflexive thought, engaged research, joy in writing and working with concepts and ideas driven by our passions’ (Mountz *et al.* 2015, p. 19). Further, as these authors indicate, this slow scholarship movement seeks to enable:

‘a feminist ethics of care that allows us to claim some time as our own, build shared tie into everyday life, and help buffer each other from unrealistic and counterproductive norms that have become standard expectations’ (Mountz *et al.*, 2015 p. 19).

So, why this is important for us as researchers in the domains of sport, exercise and health? As qualitative researchers in these subject areas, we are often particularly highly attuned to the embodied consequences for our participants of being placed in highly demanding and stressful situations. Many of us undertake research that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of others, including athletes, sportswomen (at all levels) and exercisers, and to challenge and critique social-structural constraints that have such negative impacts upon individuals and social groups. Being confronted daily and routinely by ever-mounting performativity pressures in the academic life-world can certainly generate deleterious corporeal effects and affects for us and for our colleagues across all disciplinary areas. We contend that for arts-based methods to have a valued future in our subject area, we may need to move towards collective action, ‘precisely to resist intensified pressures to do it all and/or intensify elitist structures that make “slowness” possible for some while leaving others slogging in the trenches’ (Mountz *et al.* 2015 p.14). This slow movement collective action avoids devolving responsibility to

the individual and thus away from institutional structures of power and, as Martell (2014) argues, it reintroduces what it means to be human. This is not merely a utopian ideal, though, as research demonstrates that a supportive work environment that values recognition and appreciates the non-work aspects of life, actively buffers workers against the risks of burnout (Westring 2014; Wu 2015) and other health-compromising risks.

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